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From Colonial Education to Decolonial Self-Representation: Tayeb Saddiki's Theatrical Journey

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Abstract

This article explores the conditions leading to the transplantation of French-made theatre in Morocco and the ways in which Moroccan theatre practitioners in general and Tayeb Saddiki in particular broke free, but not quite so, from the yoke of the 'molierisation' of theatre to making a theatre attuned to and reflective of the local performance culture, from imitation to initiation. This is nowhere better illustrated than in the evolution of Tayeb Saddiki, a dramatist and dramaturge who consciously caught the spirit of his age. In retracing Saddiki's theatrical journey from being a bright student of French practices to becoming a fully-fledged theatre-maker, I will gain insight into the itinerary modern Moroccan theatre took, a direction largely shaped by the directorial choices Saddiki made along the way. In so doing, I contend that Saddiki made an invaluable contribution to bridging the colonial theatre with the de-colonial theatre, setting the stage for the emergence of a re-imagined Moroccan national theatre.

Keywords: conditions, transplantation, French-made, theatre, Morocco, local performance culture, Tayeb Saddiki, modern theatre

1. Introduction

Before dwelling on Saddiki's growth from being a student of European theatrical thought to becoming a master wielding the power to weld and mould such a practice in the service of glocalising things Moroccan, I deem it necessary to take a detour to chronicle some of the key moments in the history of Moroccan theatre as influenced by the French colonial project. In the footsteps of Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821), Lyautey transplanted French theatre this time into Moroccan culture "with the prospect of changing [not only] local histrionic practices

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forever," (Bounahai, 2016, p. 52) but also the entire cultural body of the indigenous people. With recourse to erecting theatrical buildings and staging plays, French colonialism convinced its avid-for-reform-and-modernity victims of the epistemic need for using 'the Great Tradition' which harks back to Greco-Roman times to lift the whole region of Morocco out of its cultural decadence and, as Najib Bounahai perceptively puts it, help its disenfranchised inhabitants "jump onto the bandwagon of modernity." (Bounahai, 2016, p. 56) This was occasioned by the fact that the "discourse on modernity was gaining further currency in the *Mashreq* in mid-nineteenth century" (Bounahai, 2016, p. 54) as part of 'the civilizing mission'. Behind such a mission lies the conviction that "the majority of Arab writers of imaginative prose and poets demonstrated a distinct lack of imagination and flair in their works: the creative spirit needed to found a literary theatre was lacking." (Bounahai, 2016, p. 53) Bounahai correctly contends that these 'connoisseurs,' "who saw in proscenium-arch theatre a viable medium that can lift the region out of its cultural decadence," had a strong passion for European theatre that later "would prove to be the biggest assault on festive customs… that once provided the theatrical sense to the community." (Bounahai, 2016, p. 56).

1.1. Colonial Theatre and the French Civilizing Mission

The colonial machine discerned the important role Moroccan social expressive behaviors had been playing in Moroccan society in holding together its fibers of morality, politics, ideology, and culture, and therefore sought to leave them to wither away on the fringes as uncivilized ribaldry. The act of introducing histrionic Greco-Roman legacies into Morocco engendered antagonistic "moments of rupture and departure" (Amine, 2000) in the face of the 'Molièrization' of Moroccan stages. Laconically put, Lyautey's introduction of theatre was meant to achieve two basic objectives: Entertaining French settlers and using theatre as an agency to alter and eclipse local traditions and implement 'the French civilizing mission, echoing his aspirations through Karl Marx's historicist thesis of colonialism's double mission[1] and of historicist capitalism/modernity: "[the] country that is more developed industrially only shows to the less developed the image of its own future." (Chakrabarty, 2000, p. 7).

Khatibi exposes these historicist colonial matrices of power: "The murder of the traditions of the other and the liquidation of its past are necessary so that the West, while seizing the world, can expand beyond its limits while remaining unchanged in the end. The East must be shaken

[1] Marx said that: "England has to fulfill a double mission in India: one destructive, the other regenerating the annihilation of old Indian society, and the laying the material foundations of Western society in India." (Marx, as cited in Amine, 2013).

up in order to come back to the West." (Amine, 2013) In this sense, the introduction of European theatrical traditions was utilized as a means to bringing Morocco back to France, to the West. In Anibal Quijano's words,

> *The repression fell, above all, over the modes of knowing, of producing knowledge, of producing perspectives, images and systems of images, symbols, modes of signification, over the resources, patterns, and instruments of formalized and objectivized expression, intellectual or visual. It was followed by the imposition of the use of the rulers' own patterns of expression, and of their beliefs and images with reference to the supernatural. [...] The colonizers also imposed a mystified image of their own patterns of producing knowledge and meaning. At first, they placed these patterns far out of reach of the dominated. Later, they taught them in a partial and selective way, in order to co-opt some of the dominated into their own power institutions. Then European culture was made seductive: it gave access to power. After all, beyond repression, the main instrument of all power is its seduction. [...] European culture became a universal cultural model. The imaginary in the non-European cultures could hardly exist today and, above all, reproduce itself outside of these relations. (Quijano, 2007, p. 169)*

This lengthy statement shows that the colonizers did not aim solely at colonizing the natives' soil but also their minds. Yet, those unaware of Eurocentric intentions latent in colonial France's discourses of power and hegemony tend to take it for granted that Moroccan theatre came into life following 1912, a date that marked the French invasion of Moroccan territories.

1.2. Theatre of Resistance and Colonial Mimicry

Despite these historicist endeavors rooted in European ideas of Enlightenment, Moroccans were able to use theatre for resistance purposes. The term resistance highlights a deliberate opposition to French colonialism, and it also denotes support for the Resistance Movement. Furthermore, it implies that risks were taken in order to stage plays intended to awaken nationalist sentiments against occupation. Mohamed al-Quri, Mohamed al-Hadad, Abdelkhaliq Toress, and many others intrepidly spearheaded such a theatre of resistance as part of their realization of "theatre's intricate ability to subvert, or even dispense with the colonizer's authority. These subversive elements that exist on the borderline between art and life can be best articulated in the theatre through its multiple potentialities to embody what is normally thought of as incoherent, chaotic, and revolutionary." (Amine & Carlson, 2012, p. 99) In other words, the theatre of resistance was a nationalist rejection of historicist approaches as it encouraged Moroccans to reject the

so-called Franco-Hispanic democracy. When the Moroccans expelled the Spanish and French colonizers, they were basically arguing against the idea that Moroccans as a people were not yet ready to rule themselves. Whether literate or illiterate, Moroccans –just like other peoples – were always suited for self-rule. What else was this position if not a national gesture of abolishing 'the imaginary waiting room' in which Moroccans had been placed by the Franco-Hispanic historicist thought?[2]

The theatre of resistance deployed the western model of theatre making to address and redress the sufferings of the Moroccans and to have it serve as a means of subverting colonial authority. Homi Bhabha, in this regard, emphasizes hybridity's function as a "deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination." He adds that "it unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but re-implicates its identifications in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power." (Bhabha, 1994, p. 112) Robert Young concurs with Bhabha's reading of colonialism's production of mimicry and its subversive power: "[it] implies an even greater loss of control for the colonizer, of inevitable processes of counter-domination produced by a miming of the very operation of domination." (Young, 1990, p. 148) Reverting to Bhabha, it is within such a situation that "the look of surveillance returns as the displacing gaze of the disciplined, where the observer becomes the observed and 'partial' representation rearticulates the whole notion of identity and alienates it from essence." (Bhabha, 1994, p. 89) That is, due to the shifting of boundaries of difference within identity, Otherness renders itself both as reassuring and disturbing, resembling and menacing. It becomes "a dangerous place where identity and aggressivity are twinned," (Bhabha, 1986, p. xxii) a place where "a subversive slippage of identity and authority" (Bhabha, 1986, p. xxiv) takes lieu. Bhabha maintains that "in occupying two places at once…the depersonalized, disclosed colonial subject can become an incalculable object, quite literally, difficult to place. The demand of authority cannot unify its message nor simply identify its subjects." (Bhabha, 1986, p. xxii) Thus, with Bhabha, mimicry becomes both resemblance and threat: "the Black presence ruins the representative narrative of Western personhood." (Bhabha, 1994, p. 89)

Moroccan theatre of resistance was aware that mimicry has a subversive power in turning the gaze of power upon the colonizer and therefore used it to destabilize the position of the

[2] I am thinking here of Chakrabarty's description of the Indians who rejected the historicist room of history of the colonizer: "Indians, literate or illiterate, were always suited for self-rule. What else was this position if not a national gesture of abolishing the imaginary waiting room in which Indians had been placed by European historicist thought?" (Chakrabarty, 2000, p. 10).

colonizer, disperse his very identity and authority and displace the western hegemony. Amine maintains that theatre of resistance used "dramas [that] represent parodic supplements that re-inscribe a confirmation of difference. Colonial authority was denied by such dramas." (Amine, 2000, p. 101) In other words, theatre became a legitimate defense mechanism in the hands of the anti-colonial liberation movement.

Moroccan dramatists of the occupation period knew that the effectiveness of 'a theatre of resistance' could only be measured by the testimony of those present, whether they be performers, critics or audience members; a performance can elicit many different reactions from an audience, but it is the spectators who eventually determine its effectiveness; In view of this, the concrete manifestation of 'a theatre of resistance' would be a performance that either spurs spectators on to active resistance or reaffirms the Moroccans' desire to oppose the French and express their patriotic pride. This would primarily occur by means of a hidden political message, an allegory or an innuendo disguised throughout the text of a play. Alternatively, it may take the form of specific lines which would ignite a strong reaction from the spectators. The least obvious or measurable manifestation of 'a theatre of resistance' would be an entire play such as *Salah Addin Al-Ayoubi* which touts Arab-Muslim pride or speaks to the audience's preoccupations through its overarching themes. In Amine and Carlson's eyes, "The performance was very much a tribute to this historical hero, a reminder of the Arabo-Islamic colonial predicament and common destiny, as well as a call for unity from the Gulf to the Atlantic to fight the new crusaders." (Amine & Carlson, 2012, p. 74) They add that "the play became a central reference point in the emerging nationalists' consciousness and stirred up pride in an almost vanquished publish watching their ancestors' accomplishments during the heydays of Arabo-Islamic civilization." (Amine & Carlson, 2012, p. 76)

Theatergoers sought to escape the harsh realities of daily life and war through entertainment. There was also a consensus among critics that the public sought and found an ideological sanctuary in the theatre as a means of observing and nurturing patriotic sentiments. Indeed, spectators craved identification with the protagonists and were searching for subtle clues that authors might be fighting or recruiting for the resistance. For example, Mohamed al-Quri, Mohamed al-Hadad, and Abdelkhaliq Toress wrote plays that would remind them of Morocco's former glory and reinforce their solidarity in the face of their French oppressors. Their 'military' language suggests that they were seeking to express or experience a communal sentiment of ideological solidarity and create a site of deliberate resistance against the occupying French authorities which were keen on keeping the status quo.

These plays were *drames de conscience*. They feature characters who not only weigh their lives and principles against each other in extreme circumstances, but also obtain freedom from foreign oppressors. These were the very issues at the heart of Moroccans' daily fears and experiences and they needed to purge such emotions through the catharsis offered by a meditation on moral dilemmas. Moroccan theatre of resistance was the permitted spokesman for its aspirations, anguishes and searchings of the soul. Realization of the full horrors of French atrocities would surely have caused them to seek examples of Moroccan pride. That the Moroccan theatre could have reflected the profound desires of the Moroccans to express their patriotism, outwit the French or even oppose them outright, might indeed provide some comfort.

2. Tayeb Saddiki's Theatrical Journey

Tayeb Saddiki (1938-2016) was a key player and towering figure in Moroccan theatre, from the colonial period to the post-colonial present. Beginning with his early childhood years, I trace his theory and practice of theatre through times of tumultuous change and political struggle. In addition to its repressive and oppressive apparatus as evident in its military and police operations, the French colonial project used performance as a means of manipulating and controlling Moroccan life. It would be therefore interesting to see how the French cultural colonial project shaped Moroccan theatrical production during the French protectorate mandate and after independence using as examples Saddiki's stage productions. In so doing, I also delineate Sadikki's theatrical trajectory and tease out its two distinct strands: leftist and religious. The leftist strand can be clearly traced in his project baptized, Workers' Theatre (*Masrah Al-oummali*), while the religious strand manifests through his return to the rich Arab-Muslim festive practices. Between these two antagonistic lines, there lies a dangerous metamorphosis in Saddiki's ideological view which strongly dictated the themes of his later performances.

2.1. Early Encounters with French Theatre

Saddiki was born in Essaouira in 1938. In 1947 his family moved to Casablanca where he enrolled in a prestigious school reserved for '*les fils de notables*,' sons of illustrious Moroccan families at the time. It was in this colonial school that Saddiki had his first-hand exposure to the idea of theatre. In an extensive interview with Hassan Habibi, he recollects "Monsieur Sallo," the "culprit," who "stung" him with "the needles of theatre." Under the eye of this colonialist teacher, Saddiki was exposed to a fair amount of French dramatic literature, namely plays by Racine, Moliere and Corneille. He also gained a fair grasp of the rudiments of

dramaturgy. He was convinced by his teacher that "French is the door into every field of science." (Habibi, 2011, p. 47)

Such dynamics involving a master (Sallo) and an apprentice (Saddiki) both engaged in processes of knowledge transmission and reception is reminiscent of Chinua Achebe's suggestion that the act of imparting knowledge from the metropolis to the colony implicitly suggests European dramatic works are texts "others… must strain to achieve" (Achebe, 1995, p. 59) Achebe adds, "the colonialist mind" rejoices in saying "I know my natives:" "a claim which implied two things at once: (a) that the native was really quite simple and (b) that understanding him and controlling him went hand in hand." (Achebe, 1995, p. 58) This falls in line with Said's conviction that "the relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony." (Said, 1995, p. 89) Drawing up on these two key insights from Said and Achebe, I will highlight this relationship of power together with its effect on Saddiki's early understanding of theatre.

At the age of ten, Saddiki saw for the first time the Municipal Theatre in Casablanca, a theatrical building with a spacious "auditorium equipped with comfortable red seats" erected by the French colonial authority in 1922 with a view of changing the indigenous culture. He was very impressed by the performance and entertained the thought of a playhouse where "the poor occupy higher stations while the rich the lower ones." (Habibi, 2011, p. 49) Recollecting this moment in Morocco's cultural contact with this type of western entertainment, Saddiki reports on the alienation effect it had on Moroccan playgoers: "the spectators found themselves for the first time in touch with an alien form of spectacle called theatre." (Habibi, 2011, p. 45) Already a docile body ready to mimic the colonizer, he also claimed that acting and stage were not known to Moroccans. (Habibi, 2011, p. 58) Such statements give credence to Quijano's notion of "coloniality" along with its threefold interrelated dimensions: "power," "knowledge," "being." (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013, p. 7) Citing Quijano, Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni adumbrates the second dimension of coloniality:

> *[It] addresses the epistemological questions of how colonial modernity interfered with African modes of knowing, social meaning-making, imagining, seeing and knowledge production, and their replacement with Eurocentric epistemologies that assumed the character of objective, scientific, neutral, universal and only truthful knowledges. (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013, p. 8)*

2.2. Training and Early Performances

Having a penchant for shapes, decors, colors and lights, Saddiki dreamed of becoming an architect. Yet, upon his graduation from high school, he opted for *les lettres*, which the instructors misconstrued as training for the post-office. Saddiki's father did not want his ambitious son to become a postman, and thus advised him to take "a gap year" to reconsider his future. It was during this year that Saddiki learned of the trainings and workshops in theatrical arts at the Mamora Park (Forest). As noted earlier, these workshops were run by Voisin and Nugu, professional theatre directors requested from France specifically to serve the second dimension of coloniality. Voisin and Nugu divided the trainers into two groups: those who spoke Arabic such as Ahmed al-Alej and those who also spoke French such as Saddiki. This bilingual proficiency vouchsafed Saddiki the privilege of becoming an interface in the transmission of histrionic knowledge in these workshops. (Habibi, 2011, pp. 50–51)

After three months of training, Voisin and Nugu formed a professional theatrical troupe which included Saddiki, al-Alej, Khadija Amal, Fatima Regragi, Abdesaamad Kenfaoui, Taher Oua'ziz, and others. Following the formation of this troupe, the group moved to Al-jadida's Municipal Theatre and embarked on theatrical tours around the country. Saddiki impersonated Octave in *Fourberies de Joha* (1954), an adaptation[3] from Molière's *Fourberies de Scapin*, and Achater in *al-Moltahi* (The Bearded). (Habibi, 2011, pp. 52–53) The troupe performed in garages, shores, playgrounds, cinema halls, public squares, schools and market places. Clad in their attires, actors had to become *baraha* (town criers) who encouraged spectators to attend the troupe's performances. (Habibi, 2011, p. 55).

Enamored of the French way of theatre making, Saddiki was initially unconscious of coloniality's dimensions and thus unquestionably read Louis Jouvet (1887-1951), who "was a leader among leaders," a "true *homme du theater*," "a Renaissance man." (Redgrave, 1958, p. vii) Jouvet was among those who influenced Saddiki's early conception of theatre: (Habibi, 2011, p. 53) Like Jouvet who "gave a prime importance to the weight and meaning of the dramatist's word," (Redgrave, 1958, p. viii) Saddiki too held that the theatre is a fictive world. He thus "dreamt of a modern theatre similar to that of the French." (Habibi, 2011, p. 54) Practically, Saddiki established, with the aid of Nugu and others, a timber-built "real theatre" which seated 200 spectators. This new theatrical experience allowed him to discover Federico Garcia Lorca, Jean Cocteau, Noel Peirce Coward and others. He established a small theatrical group which performed a series of

[3] This play was adapted by Kenfaoui, Oua'ziz, and al-Alej.

Molière's adapted plays such as *la jalousie des barbouillé* and *médecin volant*. (Habibi, 2011, p. 56) Fond of Molière, Saddiki insisted time and again that "Morocco rejected the colonizer", yet it "applauded Molière." (Habibi, 2011, p. 57) Working together, this small group came to the realization that the playwright should become engaged in the whole theatrical process. (Habibi, 2011, p. 60). In other words, he had to become an alternative dramaturge.

It was not until 1956 that Saddiki established himself as a distinguished actor in the Moroccan Theatre Troupe, which participated in *The Festival of Paris (Figure 1)*. In the following account, Claude Confortes acknowledges the rising talent of the troupe:

> *Moroccan theater has one of the best comedians in the world. Moroccan National Theatre, subsidized by Moroccan State and under the care of the Minister of Education, has just sent to Paris, for a three-month course, one of the most extraordinarily talented members; namely Tayeb Saddiki, an actor, adapter, director and animator, the unforgettable creator for the French public, who impersonated the role of Joha in the Tricks of Joha. Adapted into Moroccan dialect from Molière's Fourberies de Scapin, the play has achieved great success in the III Festival in 1965, which marked the first event in France by Moroccan National Theatre. (Habibi, 2011, p. 77) [My translation]*



Figure 1. *Tayeb Saddiki playing Joha in 1956. The picture was given to me by Bakr Saddiki*

The performance received raving reviews from the French press. Exhibiting high artistic performance skills, Moroccans were described as innately talented in acting; the actors were lauded for their performative flair which made them communicate successfully with their

spectators; Saddiki was praised for his cleverness which engendered "Moroccan-French cooperation" and made "theatre bring together what politics scattered." (Habibi, 2011, p. 63) Other newspapers expressed their surprise at the Moroccan troupe which excelled in "playing pioneering roles in The Festival." (Habibi, 2011, p. 64)

The raving reviews granted Saddiki a golden opportunity to make friends with several dramatists and theatre directors such as Hubert Gignoux (19915-2008) who is best remembered for "inherit[ing] Copeau's vision of decentralized theatre."[4] Gignoux invited Saddiki to receive technical training in Rennes, (Habibi, 2011, p. 66) but twelve days later Saddiki had to return home. Deserted by Voisin, who returned to France, and Nugu, who joined TILMA, the first short-lived TV channel in Morocco, the troupe, whose name had until very recently echoed in and outside the kingdom, found itself unable to continue its performances. Deserted this time by its spectators, the troupe disbanded. (Habibi, 2011, p. 65) Saddiki was therefore left with the option of seeing Gignoux in Rennes. Under the auspices of the latter, Saddiki spent almost a year learning "the theatrical techniques" he "did not know in the past." Yet, despite this colonial epistemic effort, he "could not fill in the voids in [his] culture." (Habibi, 2011, p. 67) In Rennes, Saddiki avidly devoured European dramatic repertoires and under the supervision of Jean Vilar (1912-1971) in Paris absorbed European modes of theatre making.

2.3. Workers' Theatre and Political Engagement

These ideas impacted Saddiki so strongly and highly haunted his theatrical experience of Theatre of Workers, which, as a way of "remaining loyal" to his "teacher," (Habibi, 2011, p. 85) he established immediately after returning from France in 1957. Thus, following Vilar's footsteps in theatre making, Saddiki first aimed at bringing popular audiences to the theatre. His idea of Theater of Workers originated as a result of "two antagonistic yet also complementary imperatives running parallel…Running associations such as *Union Marocaine du Travail* (UMT) at present entails the capacity of those endowed with artistic gleanings together with a framework of performance." (Habibi, 2011, p. 86) He further outlines the aims of this theatre:

> *It is of paramount importance to appropriate the forms of expressions welcomed by large audiences to run these associations, and it is obvious that the theatre is the*

[4] David Bradby, Modern French Drama 1940-1990 2nd Edition (Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 89. See also Tayeb Saddiki: Hayat Masrah, p. 66. The idea of decentralization "was to give birth to an accessible theatre, theatre which could be done by people one might meet in the street (for they would belong to a permanent, resident company). Theatre in this sense was to be a national test laboratory for social and cultural relationships." (Rubin, 1994, p. 282).

> *only expressive form which is capable of catering for the needs of large throngs of people. It is for this purpose alone that Workers' Theatre came to exist, that is to say, it will be the trustworthy expressive form for workers from different walks of life. The actors who have answered the call of this Theatre will no doubt be fulfilling their role of delivering the human message till the end. (Habibi, 2011, p. 86)*

In Amine's words, "the aim of the group was to embrace the daily life suffering of laborers." (Amine, 2000, p. 112) In other words, this theatre aimed at making workers "become conscious of existing social class conflicts." (Habibi, 2011, p. 86) Workers' Theatre is thus commendable in that it drew attention to a phenomenon which had not been noticed previously by any Moroccan academic enterprises. This Theatre had seen the *classes laborieuses* informing theatre with meanings which were dangerous and distasteful to the privileged classes who controlled the modern Moroccan theatrical arena since 1912. It was the first systematic endeavor to awaken the theatrical consciousness of the workers in Morocco and to convert them to a full recognition of the overarching import of theatre. Indeed, its performances aimed to "shake conventions and traditions" (Habibi, 2011, p. 98) and "raise consciousness of the workers…who started to see parts of their lives dramatized on my stage." (Habibi, 2011, p. 88)

Of the significant plays Saddiki staged in Workers' Theatre I find al-Alej's adapted play *al-Warith* (1957) (The Inheritor) and *al-Mofattish* (The Inspector), an adaptation from Nikolai Gogol's *The Government Inspector* (1836). *Al-Warith* tells the story of a voracious inheritor, a sick man resisting death and a servant entrusted with the task of killing him at all costs. The production was an overnight sensation, which enjoyed a run of more than 100 performances in the country. As to *al-Mofattish*, it ideologically grew out of Saddiki's experiences in France when he was an actor at TNP. He saw that social plays such as *The Government Inspector* TNP performed made a stronger impression upon him. When France left Morocco under the buffets of resistance, the country's social substrata were witnessing a notorious change. Indeed, in a country where class antagonisms were becoming sharper than ever before, and where the working classes were becoming more confident in their ability to organize effective opposition, the idea of using theatrical means to spread 'socialist' (or at least, anti-capitalist) propaganda must have occurred to Saddiki who attempted to put it into practice. Horrified by the moral poverty and political violence of the time, Saddiki took *The Government Inspector* and re-imagined it through the lens of his emerging dramatic theories.

In 1957, Saddiki completed his translation of *The Inspector*'s French version into Moroccan Arabic. His main dramatic contribution resides in transforming Gogol's Khlestakov into his own Idriss, also known as Chaaban. Obviously, Saddiki borrowed Idriss's character from Hdaydan, a legendary character from Moroccan social mythology. The play is a satirical Moroccan version of Gogol's comedy telling the story of what happens when the Governor and several other self-important officials in a small Moroccan town mistake a small-time imposter for an important Rabat government official. Hypocrisies are exposed and foolishnesses revealed as the officials offer increasingly extravagant gifts in order to placate and impress their visitor who becomes more reckless in his greed. The adaptation by Saddiki was composed in a period of post-colonial Morocco, and it is a theatrical exposition of the ruling classes' social maladies, hypocrisies and foolishnesses. The play was not only a classical comedy, but also a timely theatrical piece that would cause a big stir every-time transposed onto the stage.

Saddiki's first stage of theatrical life was characterized by political idealism and determination that drove him to use art to raise challenging questions about the conflicts between politics and morality. Technically, in his twenties, Saddiki had begun to visualize a new theatrical system that would serve his political and artistic sensibility. Like Brecht,[5] he regarded the stage as an ideological tool for leftist causes and tried to create a theater that depicted human experience with the brutality of a boxing match. He gainsaid the conventions of stage realism and Aristotelian drama which offer empathetic identification with a hero and emotional catharsis. Saddiki did not want his audience to feel, but rather to be shocked, intellectually stimulated, and motivated to take action against an unjust ruling class and to awaken them to social responsibility. His Workers' Theatre exposed various forms of exploitation and encouraged its spectators to question the society's conventions, thus Saddiki's Gramscian cry: "The subordinate classes, […] must acquire consciousness of their own existence and of their own strength." (Gramsci, 1970, p. 73) Due to this Marxist orientation, he was regarded as "a dangerous leftist" (Habibi, 2011, p. 92) whose intentions are now lucidly revealed in *al-Mofattish* (Figure 2). In other words, Workers' Theatre had to stop due to this unrivalled success of the play, (Habibi, 2011) or in other words due to the lavish leftism of a promising playwright and director.

[5] It must be noted that Saddiki never took Marxism to mean a class warfare ideology, a left-wing tendency. Rather, he took avail of Marxism as a tool for analyzing society. In light of this, when I refer to Saddiki in relation to Marxism, I do not mean that he embraced this left-wing tendency like Brecht for instance. I only mean that he wrote plays with recourse to Marxist techniques and tools to question social stations, expose forms of exploitation of the working classes, and encourage the readers/viewers to question society's conventions. In this, he comes to resemble Brecht; and in this, he comes to resemble a committed Marxist.



« Revizor », de Nicolas Gogol
Adaptation et miso en scène de Tayeb Saddiki - Décors Seddik

مشهـد من « المفتش » اقتبسها عن قوقول الطيب الصديقي

Figue 2. *Tayeb Saddiki playing al-Mofattish in 1957. The picture was given to me by Bakr Saddiki*

2.4. Theatre as Education and Audience Participation

Leftist or not, Saddiki established Workers' Theatre in the spirit of inviting the downtrodden working classes to take part in political and economic discussions. As *al-Mofattish* shows, its performances were not cathartic experiences, but parts of an ongoing process of education and organization. These performances aimed at overcoming oppression and dependence and at preserving the workers' basic rights. To attract increasing interest in Arabo-Moroccan worlds and involve large sections of society, performances were given in the vernacular and idiom of the people. Also, this performative choice was meant to build up the spectators' confidence, participation, self-expression and critical awareness and encourage them to speak out, organize and change the structures and conditions which were oppressing them rather than simply be contented with their status quo. Like TNP in Paris, Workers' Theatre aimed at revitalizing the people's autonomous forms of expression, education and organization. In other words, Workers' Theatre had four basic interrelated purposes: mass education; community development; conscientization; and organization. Thus, it was a form of cultural expression and entertainment, moral and political education, community-building, and conscientization.

The conscientization process is credited to Paulo Freire's invigorating critique of oppression outlined in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* which encourages people to "develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves" and "see the world not as a static reality but as a reality in the process of transformation." (Macedo, 2000, p. 12) Unlike "consciousness-raising," which involves spectators in a "banking education" through which the transmission of pre-selected knowledge from the teacher to his students occurs, conscientization, which is reminiscent of Brecht's *verfemdungs effect* (alienation effect), interrupts and interrogates the distributions of power and calls for critical awareness. It involves recognizing that power structures are socio-historical constructs rather than predestined or natural systems, and encourages way of analyzing who and what benefits from these constructs, and of developing ways to alter or transform them in order to balance the distribution of power. (Macedo, 2000, pp. 58, 99, 104) As a teacher, Freire convinced his students to generate a notion regarding the learners creating their own codes rather than consuming centrally manufactured codes.

Saddiki embraced Freire's teachings and recognized that the process of making a drama (codification) could be a dynamic source of learning. The process of reflecting upon or discussing the drama (de-codification) was equally crucial in attaining knowledge. Compared to Freire's methodology which focused only on de-codification, Saddiki's prototype directed its attention on both. Thus, if Freire's approach was limited to de-codification alone, it followed that the learners had no control over the shaping of the code and were excluded from the codification process for the code was prepared beforehand by the teacher. Yet, because Saddiki's method involved both codification and de-codification and combined them in a dialectical way, his spectators would put on an improvised drama (codification) about an issue of common concern and afterwards discuss it (de-codification): "The audience of workers, which used to accept oppression at work, now is treated as a lord at the auditorium; a lord at places which grant it happiness." Saddiki adds, "This audience knew that it had the right to let go of dependency outside the workplace" and "unconsciously started to call for a limitless freedom…ready to contribute and take part and discuss." (Habibi, 2011, p. 91) I would thus safely claim that Workers' Theatre was not a finalized code or *product.* Rather, it was an open-ended *process* in which spectators became spect-actors actively engaged in exploring social reality in the hope of changing it. Workers' Theatre in this sense became a process of analysis, of questioning, challenging and of probing reality for deeper meaning. It is this very malleable quality as well as this transformative power of changing spectators into spect-actors, which wrought havoc on Workers' Theatre whose only curse was indeed the empowerment of its spect-actors.

Indeed, Saddiki's open stage stripped to its bare essentials treated these spectators not as cubs who needed food and nourishment but as responsible reasoning adults. Thus, by appealing to and stimulating their reason, in lieu of numbing it with the gimmicks of common stereotypes of narcotic traditional realism, Workers' Theatre was a festive moment for the spectators to become co-bodily involved with the actors in the event unfolding. Central to his view of theatre and its spectators was the conviction that avant-garde scenography needs not be denuded of entertainment. He held that it was misleading to buy into the conventional belief that the working masses do not appreciate great works and productions of the highest caliber. His Workers' Theatre thus combined moral, social and aesthetic considerations while attracting a large section of the populace. (Habibi, 2011, pp. 53–55) His personal notion of what popular theatre should be tied with his view of Greek tragedy as a pure form of civic theatre where entertainment meets knowledge. In 1967, he produced his own adaptation of Aristophanes and combined *Lysistrata* and *The Assembly of Women* into one play called *The Charming Sex*. He "did a free, not a literary, adaptation" for he "wanted to talk about [his] society." (Kotzamani, 2006, pp. 37–39) If Brecht, for example, promulgated the idea of 'revolutionary consciousness,' Saddiki on the other hand aimed for what is best termed as 'civic consciousness.' Saddiki did not only expose social structures to severe criticism but also focused on oppressive superstructures, alienated people, and the suffering of the marginalized whose wretchedness stems from a lack of understanding the historical dynamics that carry them forward to define their destiny. (Habibi, 2011, p. 38) If only they understood, they could react and act at will. Yet they are blind, unfortunately. On Saddiki's stage, the audience sees its blindness; hence, our reference to Workers' Theatre as '*a theatre of consciousness*.'

2.5. Adaptation, Direction, and Popular Theatre

In 1960, Saddiki staged his *Volpone*, an adapted version from Ben Jenson's *Volpone* (1606), a social play dealing with human relations amidst a maelstrom of inducements. He rejoined the Moroccan Theatre Troupe which was directed back then by Pierre Lucas, who cordially welcomed Saddiki and asked him to adapt Jonson's *Volpone* and stage it to Moroccan spectators. This, Saddiki did with gusto and virtuosic brio. (Habibi, 2011, p. 99)*The Government Inspector* and *Volpone* exemplify their author's reliance upon the universal dramatic repertoire because he wanted his theatrical experiences to start with staging universal masterpieces of drama and summonsing historical heroes to appear before Moroccan audiences to see and judge from their own spacio-temporal perspectives. This surely has added through and through to interweaving cultures of performance in Morocco. Original or adapted, *Volpone*

is a satirical play condemning human avarice which extends to money and all objects of desire. Driven by this avarice and endless quest for money, power and respect, the characters end up looking foolish, contemptible, spiritually and financially poorer; thus, *Volpone*'s central theme of punishment which Ben Jonson's Volpone puts as follows: "What a rare punishment / Is avarice to itself." (Jonson, n.d., Act 1, Scene 5)

Saddiki re-scripted *Volpone* and *al-Mofattish* in 1960s, a period during which Moroccan theatre was still under the baleful influence of Eurocentrism. In this vein, Amine correctly observes that "Arabic drama/theatre could not escape western telos as manifested in the European apparatus of playwriting and theatre making…Embryonic forms of Arabizations were attempted" as "a common practice." In Hamlet's words, adaptation was "the very age and body of the time his form and pressure." (Shakespeare, n.d., Act 3, Scene 2) The adapted texts thus "were native appropriations of an alien medium though they strived to mirror an inner self, for in borrowing the western model 'the shape of lives and the shape of narratives change in the process.'" (Amine, 2000, p. 44) Yet, it must be conceded that it was these endeavors that contributed to the rise of interweaving performance cultures in Morocco; and they could be primarily credited with Saddiki.

In 1964, Saddiki was appointed the director of the Municipal Theater in Casablanca, a position he would occupy until his resignation in 1977. As a way of interweaving cultures of performance, he aimed to bring great drama, Shakespeare, Racine, Corneille, Aristophanes, Brecht, Gogol, Moliere, Becket, Ionesco and many others, to the largest possible number, including working-class people. (Habibi, 2011, pp. 112–113) Yet although daunted at first by the weight of history and sheer size of this colonial heritage, he soon rose to the challenge and, instead of playing safe his Parisian success of *Fourberies de Joha*, proposed to introduce great drama to the people. Remarkably, this was also the policy behind his summer festivals across Morocco. In my view, Saddiki was a true militant who embraced the teachings of Lorca and Vilar, and believed that the theatre could not shrug off its obligations to society.[6] Despite the fact that Saddiki was elevated to the directorship of this office by King Hassan II, (Habibi, 2011, p. 110) the terms set by the local government for its operations were unfavorable. The Municipal Theatre was 'national' from the government's point of view because it was state-subsidized; 'national' from Saddiki's point of view because it brought together the nation,

[6] Indeed, Garcia Lorca was among others who influenced Saddiki's perception of theatre: "The theatre which does not feel the social pulse, the historical pulse, the drama of its people, and catch the genuine color of its landscape and of its spirit, with laughter or with tears, has no right to call itself a theatre." (Styan, 1981, p. 90).

irrespective of class distinctions. Its subsidies, however, were risible: a mere 16 million francs annually. (Habibi, 2011, p. 122) All the office equipment, costumes and props were bought by Saddik's Troupe which he founded earlier. In fact, his father provided some of the money needed to provide for the stage props. (Habibi, 2011, p. 102) To invite a large section of workers from the suburbs and help them return home before midnight, Saddiki changed the starting time of performances. Also, food was made available for them at the theatre. Every one of these praiseworthy theatrical reforms was designed to help medium- and low-income workers in a practical way and to change perceptions regarding the theatre as such. This demonstrates that Saddiki's embracement of Vilar's mode of theatre practice dictates that this performance art is a genuine "*service public*" and is as needful as "gas, water, electricity" and "as indispensible to life as bread and wine." (Shevstova, n.d., p. 65).

Saddiki opted for an austere, simple staging,[7] and challenged all theatrical pretension, symbolic acting and other manifestations of art for art's sake.[8] He embraced Vilar's ideas regarding theatre making, and consequently declared that directors are more active than playwrights.[9] Most of his productions were given on the bare stage with no scenery and only a minimum of purely functional accessories. They relied entirely on the actors and area lighting to situate the action. For him, "there is no theatre without the actor. Theatre is at the crossroads of all the arts and it is the actor who unites them in a production. Moreover, he is an interpreter." He adds that "when a play is staged, the author stops to exist. Nobody exists on stage but the actor. The actor says: 'I speak for the author, I am the scenic design; I do everything.' It's the actor who interprets the *mise-en-scène* and everything else." (Kotzamani, 2006, p. 39) Indeed, Saddiki's many innovations succeeded in giving pride of place to the actor. In the actor, he sought an internal quality, that is to say, a capacity of projecting thoughts, emotions and actions without histrionic display. This acting style vouchsafed his performances an air of poise and harmony. Yet, through an imaginative use of lighting and costume, Saddiki's productions, though sometimes clearly sumptuous, were far from being austere. Indeed, they achieved a degree of virtuosity.

[7] For example, see his performance of *Al-haraz* available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n2n-Inoo3ig.

[8] He says, "I do not believe in symbolism in theatre. Nor do I believe in didactic or political theatres; they lack the element of entertainment which is needful for the art of theatre." (Habibi, 2011, p. 23).

[9] In the words of J. L. Styran, Vilar concluded that "the modern French director was more active than the French playwright, and dared argue that Racine had done great harm to French theatre by suggesting that the source of drama lay in the ink-bottle, and that a play could be given life merely by good dialogue and strong 'sermonizing.'" (Styan, 1981, pp. 104–105). In other words, Vilar went against those who understood theatre as a work of art, and advocated notions of historical avant-garde in the theatre. He thus viewed theatre as a festival or as an event. Saddiki embraced his teacher's ideas and put them into practice literally.

Saddiki found out that "Artaud's theory of theatrical creativity" offers significant avant-garde histrionic contributions as it "lay in magic, incarnation and music working upon the emotions, and that it should make use of the stage as a physical medium with its own language of dance and mime independent of speech." Borrowing performative insights from Copeau too, Saddiki wanted a "poetry of the senses" based on "improvisation and the plastic arts of movement and gesture." Saddiki too thought that this approach "would have the advantage of restoring to popular appeal the spectacular element in drama without repeating the false values of" the recent "past." (Styan, 1981, pp. 104–105) It seems that modern Moroccan theatre, which began with intricate devices of symbolism at times of colonial unrest, may have come full circle in its search for artlessness.

2.6. Toward a Distinctive Moroccan Theatre

In 1967, Saddiki became aware of the dimensions of coloniality as he "realized that the series of plays he adapted, translated, or Moroccanized were not projecting his deeply rooted festive instincts." (Amine, 2000, p. 112) After adapting and translating about thirty plays, he "was overwhelmed by the idea that this is a transplanted theatre that does not reflect the inner self of Moroccans." (Amine, 2000, p. 112) He thus declared his return to the "collective imaginary" and to "people's stories and myths" in search of Arabo-Islamic stage heroes. In other words, he returned to our festive histrionic practices to emancipate his theatre from colonial influences. It was in this very context that he discovered Almejdoub, a sixteenth-century century mystic poet (Figure 3). Saddiki brilliantly transferred Almejdoub's oral poetry to literacy and drama. This gave birth to *Sidi Abderahman Almejdoub*, a masterpiece "drama that won an exceptional success in Morocco." (Amine, 2000, p. 112) In the spirit of staging past mystic figures, Saddiki also wrote other plays such as *Abu Hayan Tawhidi: An Entertaining Bsat* (1983). He staged Abu Hayan Tawhidi, dragged him into his dramatic court and put him into an accusation cage. Saddiki aimed at rehabilitating Tawhidi who was "the philosopher of litterateurs and the litterateur of philosophers." (al-Hamawi, n.d.).

2.7. Mysticism and Ritual Performance

Because of his ideological shift from Marxism to Mysticism, Saddiki's conception of theatre had to change as well. Going against his theories and practice of theatre manifested in his Theatre of Workers and its enlightening philosophy, Saddiki now turned to his childhood religious springs of knowledge. Influenced by "his spiritual teacher" (Habibi, 2011, p. 30) who was but his father, a revered "Imam in Zawiya Tidjaniya," (Habibi, 2011, p. 35) Saddiki now started to look at theatre as "a spiritual adventure" and "as a mystic worshipper." (Habibi, 2011,

p. 18) He adds, “It was through al-Jadba ceremonies, maraboutism and mysticism” that “Moroccans established strong relationships with the unseen world.” (Habibi, 2011, p. 24) Somewhere else in the same interview, he declares that “theatre is a medium for healing psychological deformities.” (Habibi, 2011, p. 38) Saddiki thus associates theatre with religious spaces in which, as Daniel Deslauriers puts it, believers learn “how to deal, accept, and move with the unknown.” Saddiki and Deslauriers do not only understand theatre as a ritual, a space of enacting and remembering the sacred, but also as a space of reaffirming “personal, communal, and spiritual intentions and purposes.” (Alhajri, 2007, p. 14) Theatre for these is a space for psychological practices of healing and remembering, or, in the words of William Robertson Smith, “a bond of union” (Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p. 31) between the human and the divine. Ignoring the “trance theory” raised by anti-ritualists, I am here concerned with the ritual’s emphasis on the pre-eminence of performance over text. In this sense, by looking at theatre as a religious space, Saddiki was in fact arguing in favor of avant-garde theatre aesthetics which abandoned the notion of an artwork for that of an event.



Figue 3. *Al-Mejdoub Festival in Timgad in Algiers in 1968. The picture was given to me by Bakr Saddiki*

Drawing upon past events through al-halqa technique, Saddiki’s *Almejdoub* and *Abu Hayan Tawhidi* so delicately poised the lives of their heroes between laughter and tears and brought them into life at a time during which Moroccan theatre was epistemically at low ebbs (Figure 4). They draw on the past to paint the present because the past is “the repository of virtue and

lost wisdom" and stands "exalted in proportion to its antiquity above the puny present," (Briffault, 1919, p. 12) and because "of all the arts, theatre is perhaps the one least able to escape the past, even as it is itself changing in terms of a changing present; never is its stage an empty space, free from echoes of previous [experiences]." (Brown, 1997, p. 9) In short, the plays successfully attempted to delineate the new modes of experiencing the cultural world in post-colonial Morocco which the Franco-Hispanic colonialism had generated, yet always through what a critic called "a form of an ideal order." This suggests that "the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past." (Sarhan & Elyas, 1987, p. 31) In this sense, the act of dramatizing Almejdoub and Tawhidi was "a restored behavior" (see note 95) at the bottom of which lies a destructive force that destroys and regenerates behaviors anew. This means that theatrical performances occur "here and now *between* actors and spectators," (Fischer-Lichte, 2005, p. 24) and that they "are never consciously repeated copies, and even their deviations are part of the dynamic of restored behavior." (Carlson, 2004, p. 4)



Figue 4. *A scene from 1984 performance of Abu Hayan Tawhidi. The picture was given to me by Bakr Saddiki*

3. Conclusion

To wrap up, from-colony-to-post-colony restored behavior must perforce lead to negotiating a plethora of epistemic systems. Scholars such as Mignolo contend that "geo-politics of knowledge go hand in hand with geo-politics of knowing." Bhabha argues that the result of the act of epistemic negotiation is the construction of liminal and hybrid third spaces which "create something new which [is] neither one nor the other but both at the same time," a condition "brought about by the interweaving of cultures." (Fischer-Lichte, 2010, p. 12) Saddiki knew that if there is a fact before which Moroccans may bow in solemn reverence and silent wonder,

it is that they are the children of this productive third space, which interweaves, destroys and engenders cultures anew; that Europe should be credited for presenting its theatrical talents to us, that is an uncontested prodigy captured by Chakrabarty's objective statement: "European thought is a gift to us all. I can talk of provincializing it only in an anti-colonial spirit of gratitude;" (Chakrabarty, 2000, p. 255) that he and others availed themselves of Western artistic inventions, that is also a prodigy which cannot be contested as well; yet he also knew that coloniality's power matrices are no less a prodigy. They are a 'tale told by an idiot' and hedged with all manner of reluctance, of doubt, of objection, of downright denial.

Disclosure Statement

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